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Classified By: Political External Unit Chief Edgard Kagan. Reasons 1.4  
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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Politics remains the cornerstone of Sino-African relations even though the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)(Ref A) will tout extensive economic ties, including burgeoning two-way trade and as many as 2,500 bilateral agreements, Chinese scholars have told us. As China increasingly asserts itself on the international stage, FOCAC has become China's most visible framework for advancing its interests in Africa by enabling China to group cohesively numerous and disparate bilateral initiatives for greatest optical effect. The PRC still implements its Africa policies through strictly bilateral agreements. The PRC's desire to isolate Taiwan diplomatically was perhaps the driving force behind FOCAC's creation in 2000 and Chinese leadership's decision to host this year's forum as a summit reflects the PRC's intent to maximize political pressure on the five African countries still in Taiwan's camp. However, with the rapid growth of China's economy and Sino-African economic relations, as well as the PRC's recent success in expanding its one-China policy in Africa, the PRC now views FOCAC and its overall efforts in Africa as opportunities to "build its international reputation" and show China has become an active participant in such areas as international security cooperation, Chinese scholars assert. China is willing to consider specific proposals from the West for cooperating on development initiatives in Africa but is wary of being too closely associated with Western conditionality, according to MFA officials and Chinese scholars. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Poloffs separately discussed Sino-African relations in the FOCAC context with Xu Weizhong, Director of the Department of African Studies of the Ministry of State Security-affiliated China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), Wang Yingying, Senior Research Fellow at the MFA-affiliated Chinese Institute of International Studies (CIIS), Wang Hongyi, CIIS Associate Research Fellow, An Hongquan, Deputy Director of the State Council Development Research Institute (an in-house think tank for the State Council), Professor Xiao Bai of Renmin University's Institute for Strategic Studies, MFA officials and a number of Beijing-based African diplomats.

## A Political Cornerstone

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¶3. (C) Politics remains the cornerstone of Sino-African relations even though FOCAC's Beijing Summit will tout extensive economic ties, including burgeoning two-way trade and as many as 2,500 bilateral agreements (Ref B), CIIS's Wang Yingying and Wang Hongyi said. Chinese scholars have told us that for many years China's primary diplomatic concerns in Africa were Taiwan and more general ideological support (such as "South-South cooperation"). As China increasingly asserts itself on the international stage, the PRC now sees FOCAC and China's efforts in Africa as opportunities to "build its international reputation" and show China has become an active participant in such areas as international security cooperation, according to Wang Yingying and Wang Hongyi. FOCAC has become China's most visible mechanism for forging a "strategic partnership" with Africa, reflecting Beijing's views that Africa is an increasingly important political bloc for the PRC both to protect its interests and "democratize" international relations, Wang Yingying said. China's attention to the Africa bloc paid dividends in PRC efforts to stifle what it viewed as unfavorable United Nations Security Council reforms. MFA officials have told us that China lobbied African countries bilaterally to thwart possible African Union proposals on UNSC reform that could potentially lead to political compromises resulting in a permanent Security Council seat for Japan (Ref C).

¶4. (C) With China's preeminent foreign policy goal to create a relatively stable international environment in order to ensure China's internal development will continue unchecked, Africa plays an important role in China's national security strategy, Wang Hongyi said. By way of illustration, Wang cited the link between China's energy needs and possible

market disruptions caused by political chaos in the Sudan or the Horn of Africa. In Africa, "stability is of paramount importance," MFA Deputy Africa Department Division Director Hu Zhangliang told us (in response to a discussion on China's frequent opposition to targeted sanctions).

## Taiwan's Significance

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¶5. (C) Renmin University Institute for Strategic Studies Professor Xiao Bai told us that competition with Taiwan continues to be an important factor in PRC Africa policy. The State Council Development Research Institute's An Hongquan stressed that China's desire to isolate Taiwan diplomatically was perhaps the driving force behind China's decision to establish FOCAC in 2000. The PRC's success at bringing African countries under its one-China policy over the past several years (including Liberia, Senegal and Chad), as well as the rapid growth of both its own economy and Sino-African economic relations, have created the opportunity to broaden FOCAC's scope, An said. Noting that he had attended an October 26 internal meeting at the People's Daily to discuss the FOCAC Summit, Xiao said that the PRC leadership's decision to hold a summit-level forum this year in Beijing reflects not only the intention to show China as a major player in Africa but also to place maximum political pressure on African countries still in the Taiwan camp. Xiao commented that the PRC expects most if not all five to send observer delegations at the Foreign Minister or Vice Minister level.

¶6. (C) African diplomats in Beijing generally say they believe that China will run the table in the near future and establish diplomatic ties all 53 African countries, shutting out Taiwan. "The economic incentives are great," a South African diplomat said, while noting that African countries also face some pressures from counterparts in sub-regional organizations to abandon Taiwan for the sake of both protocol and convenience. The PRC also vigilantly guards against

backsliding on Taiwan. "During high-level visits, we always lead off with the one-China policy," an Egyptian diplomat said, "but after that we turn to a broad range of substantive issues."

#### Omnibus Framework

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¶7. (C) Practically, the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation has become China's most visible framework for advancing its interests in Africa by enabling the PRC to group cohesively numerous and disparate bilateral initiatives for greatest optical effect, Chinese academics and African diplomats have told us. Africa policy continues to be implemented on a strictly bilateral basis through government-to-government agreements and PRC support for Chinese enterprises, but China uses the FOCAC mechanism to maintain and improve continent-wide relations, CICIR's Xu Weizhong said. "We conduct serious business bilaterally," Xu added by way of underscoring constraints on the Forum's potential to evolve into a broader multilateral mechanism.

¶8. (C) A Ugandan diplomat told us the Forum's principle value is that it demonstrates that China takes Africa seriously, both politically and economically. While initiatives such as debt reduction or special preferential treatment (SPT) for African imports will not necessarily benefit every country, China encourages many African countries to strengthen bilateral ties, an Ethiopian diplomat stated. On a more cautionary note, a Nigerian diplomat said some African delegations may view the Beijing Summit as "another jamboree" but expressed his confidence that China will "pursue aggressively" any bilateral commitments undertaken. The PRC is not concerned that African countries will seek to co-opt the Forum for any particular cause because the Africans respect China and are generally constrained by parochial concerns from speaking with one voice, according to a South African diplomat, who added that "there is simply no African consensus on Sino-African relations."

#### Opportunities To Cooperate?

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¶9. (C) The Beijing Summit is largely closed to Western participation. In public and private, Chinese and African officials vigorously refute Western criticism that Sino-African relations are mercantile, neo-colonial or otherwise tilted sharply in China's favor at the expense of

African economic sovereignty. Asked whether the FOCAC mechanism presents opportunities for cooperation with the West on African development initiatives, Chinese academics and officials generally answer that China seeks cooperation "on an equal basis." The Chinese view FOCAC as a bilateral mechanism. CIIS's Wang Hongyi said that "China sees more and more cooperation with the West on African development initiatives, but generally will seek cooperation through United Nations agencies and other multilateral mechanisms." Wang said that China has long-expressed a desire to cooperate with Western pharmaceutical companies for the provision of medicines to Africa but has received little interest. When pressed as to why the PRC Ministry of Commerce will not provide basic information on country-specific assistance, making it difficult for Western aid donors to build trust or coordinate development initiatives, Wang conceded that "China lags in information flow" but argued that current leadership is trying to improve China's transparency.

¶10. (C) CICIR's Xu said China is "thinking seriously of expanding international cooperation on Africa but is hesitant to become associated with Western conditionality." In addition, Xu said, the "West is not willing to have equal cooperation." When pressed that on-the-ground efforts to involve China in donor coordination mechanisms in Africa are often not successful, Xu cited China's gradualist approach to economic initiatives, such as the introduction of Special Economic Zones. Xu said China's wariness of Western

intentions may be overcome through discrete development proposals that can build trust through their implementation. "The Chinese way is to start small, see if something works, then expand," Xu added. MFA Deputy Division Director Hu said China will "attach great importance" to specific Western aid proposals, particularly in the areas of health, agriculture or infrastructure development. A Zimbabwean diplomat noted that China is keen to access Western donor funds for its construction projects in Africa. However, Chinese academics and officials generally say that the onus is on Western countries or companies to propose initiatives, stressing that any China cooperation with the West on Africa must include African input. "The ball is in (the West's) court," MFA Deputy Division Director Hu said, arguing that China and the West do not have any major conflicts of interest in Africa. Randt